

The Art of Critically Balanced Thinking

by Dr Shawn Ireland, Ed.D and Lorne Kelton, M.Ed

In the fast-paced world we live in, how often do we take decisions without really thinking critically? How often do we find coachees - and ourselves as coaches - constrained by biases and assumptions?

The challenge is not a lack of interest or effort but rather the lack of an effective method to address the contradictions and frustrations that stand in the way of thinking critically. Help is at hand. The IFRAME process is a new and useful tool enabling coaches to untangle the perceived complexity of critical thinking, and provides a practical formula to address the challenges in today's demanding environments. It enables us to explore our long-held assumptions, bring our thoughts into focus and analyse them, and provides an opportunity to re-think the way we think and achieve more desirable outcomes.

The IFRAME Critical Thinking Process

		What do I do?	What happens next?
I	Incident	<i>Pay attention</i> to an inciting incident that happens to me or that I trigger	An <i>inciting incident</i> significantly upsets the balance of forces in my life
F	Feelings	Have an <i>emotional reaction</i> to the incident	I experience a <i>physical, mental, or spiritual reaction</i> to what has happened
R	Reflection	Ask myself and others <i>probing questions</i> to understand my response to the incident	I probe <i>where</i> my assumptions, biases, and reactions are <i>coming from</i>
A	Assumptions	<i>Bring my assumptions about the incident to the surface</i> to verify their validity and analyse their consequences	I get honest with myself and <i>look for trends and patterns</i> in my biases and assumptions
M	Meaning	<i>Interpret the meaning</i> and apply this heightened awareness to incidents in my life	I <i>challenge my assumptions</i> and explore new ways of thinking about the incident
E	Execution	<i>Formalise the process</i> with action planning to apply to future incidents	I <i>implement</i> a disciplined strategy to achieve new critical thinking outcomes

We all approach issues in a different way, have different ways of thinking. So, when exploring with coachees their interpretation of a situation, we have to listen and observe deeply to understand the personal preferences that are influencing the way they think. As coachees relate and reflect on incidents, we are then able to "tune in" to their preferred approach, and help them to become more self-aware and to better process their thoughts.

In our practice we are finding that linking the IFRAME critical thinking process with MBTI profiles is a powerful experience for both coachee and coach. For instance, if the coachee is an 'F', then their approach to reflection will be more people and relationship focused. However, a 'T' will be more focused on logic and facts than relationships. The reflective approach of an 'S' pays focus to the interaction with their environment and the physical response to it. But, an 'N' listens to their inner voice, so their reflection is more experiential in nature. With these different profiles in mind, and through active listening, careful and varied questioning, paying attention to the coachee's use of language, emotions and body language, we are able to guide coachees in using the IFRAME in the way that suits them best. The clarity and self-awareness that ensue for the coachee are quite revelatory, like a dark cloud lifting, an "Aha moment".

The IFRAME is flexible and easy-to-use, with each of the six steps representing a milestone in the journey to becoming critically self-aware, enabling us to appreciate the assumptions we make and explore new ways of thinking critically.

Further details of the critical thinking process outlined here can be found at www.go-iframe.com

Dr Shawn Ireland, Ed.D, is Managing Director of HRCgroup, an international management development and organisation development practice. He is a psychologist with some 25 years' experience in coaching and leadership development. shawn.ireland@hrc-group.com

Lorne Kelton, M.Ed, is president of ThinkShift Performance Solutions, a Learning and Development company. He focuses on innovative learning practices enabling organisations to achieve performance breakthroughs. lorne@thinkshift.com

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